

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

4. (Amended) A recombinant DNA comprising the gene of claim  
1.

a2

5. (Amended) An expression vector for a microorganism, an animal cell or a plant cell, comprising the gene of claim 1 or the recombinant DNA of claim 4.

9. (Amended) A polypeptide possessing a ceramidase activity, encoded by the gene of claim 1.

a3

11. (Amended) An antisense DNA which is complementary to the gene of claim 1 or a part thereof.

a4

12. (Amended) An Antisense RNA which is complementary to the gene of claim 1 or a part thereof.

a5

14. (Amended) An oligonucleotide probe or primer, capable of specifically hybridizing to the gene of claim 1, or a complementary stand thereof.

*A5*  
*com.* 15. (Amended) An antibody or a fragment thereof, capable of specifically binding to the polypeptide of claim 8.

*A6* 20. (Amended) A method of controlling an amount of ceramide in a cell and/or in a tissue, characterized by introducing the gene of claim 1 or an antisense nucleic acid thereof into the cell and/or the tissue, thereby controlling the amount of ceramide in the cell and/or in the tissue.

TECHNICAL DRAWING